

Arrogance Under Oppression

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Abstract: There is a curious phenomenon where people from marginalized populations are taken to be arrogant when they show no signs of superiority. In effect, their actions are misconstrued, and their attitudes are rendered unintelligible. Given that arrogance is standardly taken to be a flaw in one's moral character, understanding such misattributions should give us insight into the affective marginalization many people face. This talk aims to give a thorough exploration of arrogance under oppression. I argue that arrogance is a kind of self-preoccupation that involves projecting one's values, goals, and concerns onto others as if they were objective values, goals, and concerns. When the affectively marginalized communicate their self-respect through things like protest, people mistake that self-respect as self-preoccupation given how the affectively marginalized are constructed. Furthermore, given how affective marginalization not only inhibits how the marginalized are understood by others, but inhibits their own affective lives, I argue that taking up an arrogant attitude is not always morally vicious, but can be a beautiful form of political resistance but all things considered good.

In August of 2016, then NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick refused to stand during the U.S. national anthem, sitting on the bench instead, waiting for the ceremonial performance to end and for the game to start. When asked in the post-game press conference why he sat instead of stood, Kaepernick said that he was sitting in protest of the ongoing racial violence against black people in the United States, that he was "not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color" (Sandritter). This protest quickly grew with athletes from different sports participating by taking a knee during the pre-game anthem. While some appreciated Kaepernick using his platform to bring attention to issues of racial injustice, others found the display to be gross, immoral, and *arrogant*.

Kaepernick's apparent arrogance for this action was a heavily discussed point that year, with pundits, politicians, and public figures, from former Republican Governor Mike Huckabee to the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, levying accusations of

arrogance against him.¹ Despite the frequency of these accusations, when looking at Kaepernick's actions, and his reasons for engaging in those actions, it is difficult to see how he is arrogant. Arrogance, pre-philosophically, involves superiority or believing oneself to be special or important in some way, something not clearly present in Kaepernick's protest. However, charges of arrogance were an extremely common response. And, furthermore, it is a trend that is common among populations that are marked by an expectation of servility, what we might call *affectively marginalized* populations (see, Whitney 2018). Kaepernick being called arrogant isn't an anomaly but paradigmatic of the affective marginalization that many racial and gender minoritized people face.

But why are members of marginalized groups often called arrogant despite not actually being arrogant? What relevant features of a person's attitude are being mistaken as arrogance? What are the features of arrogance that make such criticisms harmful? Claiming arrogance where there is no arrogance is a misperception that flows from oppressive norms and expectations. These norms and expectations not only paint the way people of privilege perceive the affectively marginalized, they paint how the affectively marginalized perceive themselves. What can you do when others are systematically valued over you, expecting you to serve their needs, and calling you arrogant when you stand up for yourself? If marginalization affects how your attitudes are perceived, do they also affect the evaluation of those attitudes? An ongoing project in feminist moral psychology is reclaiming and re-evaluating negative moral attitudes, exploring how emotions like anger, bitterness, contempt, and others can be politically valuable and morally permissible. What is arrogance's status when reconsidering it from the point of view of oppression?

This paper explores arrogance from this point of view, proceeding in three parts. First, I articulate and defend an account of arrogance as a form of self-preoccupation, centering the *self*, projecting the arrogant person's cares, concerns, and needs onto the social world. Second, I argue that misattributions of arrogance result from how oppression "constructs" the oppressed as servile, leading to a self-respecting person to appear arrogant. In effect, charges of arrogance often function to silence marginalized people. Third, and finally, I argue that arrogance can be all things considered good when present in such marginalized people because it can serve as a form of political resistance to

¹ The list includes former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (Hoffman), Bay Area sports columnist Lowell Cohn (Smith), and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Levitz; and her retraction is in de Vogue).

oppression. This species of arrogance attracts and uplifts other members of a marginalized community, providing strength and resilience when fighting against injustice, giving an ideal to strive toward when one's self-esteem is low. I call this beautiful arrogance.

1. Understanding Arrogance

Arrogance is marked by superiority. Understanding arrogance's moral character—in what way it is vicious and where the problematic attribute lies—involves understanding this superiority. The paradigmatically arrogant think of themselves as higher stock. Perhaps if they were the subject of a typical ethical thought experiment involving misguided doctors, lifeboats, or runaway transit vehicles, they would argue—or at least secretly think that—you ought to save them over the "average" person. Or maybe they are like Jane Krakowski's character on the sitcom *30 Rock*, who once when entering a room announced, "Listen up fives, a ten is speaking!"² This particularly absurd example tells us quite a bit about arrogance. Following Tiberius and Walker (1998), one of the primary features of arrogance is that it creates an interpersonal hierarchy, altering one's perception of others. Part of believing that you are a particularly great person is to believe that others are worse than you. Thus, when making relationships, the arrogant have a sense of whether they are better or worse than the people they are interacting with, effectively *looking down* on many who do not make the ranks. Krakowski's *30 Rock* character, then, is just making explicit something all arrogant people do.

Most philosophers working on arrogance argue that interpersonal hierarchies are an important feature of arrogance, following the insight from Tiberius and Walker (1998).³

² "I Heart Connecticut." *30 Rock*. NBC. 14 April 2011. Television.

³ Macalaster Bell (2013) builds on their view, arguing that interpersonal superiority is central to arrogance, but further claims that arrogance necessarily involves desiring that superiority be recognized and manifesting an *ill will* toward others (p. 110). It is the ill will, for Bell, that makes arrogance distinct and vicious, which flows from the desire to have such superiority recognized. However, if we take the notion of an interpersonal hierarchy seriously, then it is easy to imagine an arrogant person simply not caring of the opinion of those they find lower, that their lower status doesn't warrant recognition. The arrogant person's self is insulated from criticisms from those they find unworthy. Recognizing the variety of ways arrogance can manifest itself, Robin Dillon (2007) argues that there are two distinct kinds of arrogance: interpersonal arrogance and unwarranted claims arrogance. Interpersonal arrogance develops the insights from Tiberius and Walker, while unwarranted claims arrogance is a version of arrogance where the arrogant attitude involves an entitlement to success, respect, and freedom from consequences. Importantly, interpersonal arrogance always involves unwarranted claims arrogance, arrogating respect and deference from interpersonal relations, but unwarranted claims arrogance can stand alone. What

Most recognize that arrogance involves a constellation of superiority, desire for deference, and entitlement, with different accounts centering different aspects. For example, Macalester Bell (2013) centers the desire for deference and particularly how that desire manifests as ill will towards others. Alternatively, Robin Dillon (2007) centers entitlement, the way the arrogant make unwarranted claims on others for respect, deference, or advantage. But in centering one feature, each view misses important insights from the others. I argue there is a further dimension to arrogance that unifies these disparate features. Arrogance is a kind of self-preoccupation that manifests two different forms of disrespect. Arrogant superiority, on my account, involves projecting one's values, cares, and concerns onto others such that they see the world as shaped by their own self. It is what *they* care about that animates the world around them. This self-preoccupation is itself morally vicious, which makes arrogance deeply vicious since it is not only the disrespectful nature of the attitude that is morally objectionable but the way it is rooted in self-preoccupation. I begin by looking at these two kinds of disrespect present in arrogance and then argue that both are rooted in an agent's self-preoccupied perception of the world around them.⁴

Arrogant people who think they're more worthy of being saved from the misguided doctor or runaway transit vehicle clearly find themselves to be *morally more valuable* than others—to count for more in the moral equation. There are of course those who are particularly virtuous, making them *morally better people* but such individuals are not *morally more valuable* than others. Having a virtuous character does not, from a moral point of view, make anyone more valuable than anyone else. Being arrogant in this way is a clear moral failing, but not all those who are arrogant believe themselves to be morally more valuable than others. Conceiving oneself as morally more valuable than others is simply one way an interpersonal ranking may manifest in a person's character and attitudes. Alternatively, the arrogant may think of themselves as deserving more respect or appreciation. Their own self-evaluation may not be so outsized that they find

Dillon finds central to arrogance is the arrogating of rights, respect, and deference. Arrogant superiority on this view is about entitlement and obtaining interpersonal, social, or material goods.

⁴ The two kinds of disrespect I articulate roughly follow the two kinds of arrogance that Robin Dillon (2007) articulates. In effect, my account of self-preoccupied arrogance unifies what Dillon things are two separate kinds of arrogance.

themselves more deserving of saving than others but may still think they are entitled to a certain level of attention, praise, respect, or deference.⁵

The difference between these two kinds of arrogance may be in what kind of respect the arrogant take themselves to be entitled to—and the corollary disrespect they show others. Stephen Darwall (1977) makes a distinction between *recognition* respect and *appraisal* respect. The former is the kind of respect owed to all persons in virtue of being persons (38). The latter is the kind of respect owed to those due to the qualities of their character and is therefore only owed to some (39). Those who believe themselves to be *morally more valuable* expect recognition respect, either in greater degree than others or instead of others. In doing so, they will often engage in a kind of disrespect of others along the lines of their moral recognition. In making an interpersonal ranking where they are owed outsized recognition respect, they necessarily will engage in disrespecting those they rank themselves above.

Alternatively, some arrogant people, while not feeling entitled to an excess of recognition respect, do feel entitled to appraisal respect. Of course, many people are entitled to appraisal respect, including many arrogant people. However, the arrogance rooted in appraisal respect entitlement comes from the way they disrespect others. Someone may be entitled to appraisal respect regarding their skills and talents and seek such respect without disrespecting others. The arrogant, however, in creating the interpersonal ranking, do disrespect others because it requires others who are ranked lower to *prove* themselves to the arrogant person, making the disrespect, or looking down on others, preemptive.⁶ This form of arrogance is closely related to snobbery, perhaps familiar in many nerds. It is not uncommon for such people to look down on those who know less than them about their expertise. However, if a person can prove their knowledge or skill, then the hitherto denied respect is given. (This kind of arrogant gatekeeping will likely be familiar to anyone who went to graduate school in philosophy.) The arrogant nerd, in such cases, assumes people do not deserve this respect, prior to making a “reasoned” judgment on the matter.

These two manifestations of arrogance give us insight into another feature of arrogance: it can be global or local. The arrogant person who believes themself to simply

⁵ This is a crucial insight from Thomas E. Hill, Jr. (1991) and Robin Dillon (2007), where they argue arrogance is (at least in part) about arrogating rights that they feel entitled to.

⁶ To see the interpersonal nature of this failing we can compare this kind of arrogance with contempt. See, Mason (2003)

be a *better person* has what I call global arrogance. Think of the arrogant person who makes a faulty inference from some accomplishment, like becoming a top-tier doctor. Being a doctor is the origin of this arrogance, but their arrogance extends far beyond this domain, they may also find volunteering at their child's school unnecessary, they talk down to service staff, they cut in front of people in line, and so on. A person has global arrogance when their arrogance permeates all aspects of their life, "ranking" everyone in every context, such that it is an invariable part of their character, resulting in them thinking they are morally more important than others. Alternatively, those with appraisal respect entitlement have local arrogance. Local arrogance is only present in specific contexts, ranking people only in those contexts, making the arrogance a context-dependent part of their character. They are like the arrogant doctor who is only arrogant in the context of the hospital. They view the hospital staff, nurses, and other doctors along an interpersonal hierarchy, but outside of this context they may be perfectly generous, personable, and humble.

Let's briefly take stock of what I have discussed so far. Arrogance is a kind of superiority that often involves an interpersonal ranking where others are placed above or below the arrogant person. Interpersonal rankings manifest in two different ways. It can manifest as one finding oneself morally more important than others (global arrogance) or by finding oneself entitled to special praise, respect, or deference (local arrogance). These are two different ways a person can be arrogant with different explanations for what makes the arrogance vicious. What unifies these two forms of disrespect is the *self-preoccupied* nature of arrogance.⁷ This self-preoccupation both underlies these forms of disrespect and is a morally problematic way of attending to others. Before presenting how self-preoccupation unifies these forms of disrespect, let's first get clear on how arrogance is self-preoccupied.

The notably arrogant walks around looking down on others, finding faults and shortcomings with others according to what *they* find important based on those characteristics that are important to themselves. It is *their* values, cares, concerns that dictate the interpersonal hierarchy which they project onto the world around them. This

⁷ This notion of self-preoccupation is one we can find in Iris Murdoch's philosophy where she argues that "by opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us... our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually *self-preoccupied*, often falsifying veil" (1970, p. 82, emphasis mine). Here I am taking Murdoch to be talking broadly of all the ways the self gets in the way of attending to people, but my understanding of the self-preoccupation that is central to arrogance is narrower and will be distinguished from other forms.

projection is characteristic of the type of self-preoccupation the arrogant exhibit. The self-preoccupation involves extending or projecting something about one's self onto others. This kind of active self-preoccupation can be contrasted with other forms of self-preoccupation that are more passive. Imagine the person so anxious, worried, and insecure that their engagement with others is also self-preoccupied, but in a notably different way. The anxious self doesn't actively project one's values, but passively distorts the world by taking every interaction as an attack, dig, or slight. The anxiously self-preoccupied do not think of themselves as superior or more important, but their world is still distorted by the self, albeit the insecure self. The arrogant though, do not think little of themselves, they suffer from a vice of too much security, as it were, projecting their cares and concerns onto others.

The active projecting of one's self involves thinking there is an *objective* importance to what the arrogant take to be important. All of us find certain things personally important, and this often guides what we find meaningful and what projects gain our devotion. We may even sometimes project these values onto the world to find community with those who share the same goals, hopes, and dreams. But the non-arrogant person often recognizes that there are other perfectly acceptable values, passions, or ways of living. Not so with the arrogant who takes failures along their personal standards to count as some significant loss of value.⁸ It is in taking what they find important as objectively important that facilitates the arrogant person's predilection for looking down on others. What the arrogant person finds important is what *others* should find important as well. That everyone should see the world in the way the arrogant person does.

This is not a wholly original insight, as this dimension of arrogance has already been recognized by feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye. Frye articulates a patriarchal tendency for men to view women with what she calls the "arrogant eye." Frye says that those who see with the arrogant eye "organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests" (1981, p. 67). She goes on, "The arrogating perceiver is a teleologist, a believer that everything exists and happens for some purpose, and he

⁸ That arrogance has to do with the way one values, and those values interact with the way others value, has been explored by Robin Dillon on the topic (2007, p. 105). However, Dillon believes this is central to interpersonal arrogance, but not unwarranted claims arrogance. My arguments suggest that in projecting values on the world, this creates the conditions for the entitlement central to unwarranted claims arrogance to flourish.

tends to animate things, imagining attitudes toward himself as the animating motives” (1981, p. 67). The arrogant eye makes the world around the arrogant “edible”, it makes the world about one’s *self* (p. 76). For Frye, the underlying attitude and power of the arrogant eye comes from men’s dominant position in society. It is a result of patriarchal power that allows them to control the world “with a glance.” In naming this kind of perception, ‘the arrogant eye’ Frye is attempting to illustrate how a particular patriarchal attitude found in men is vicious by showing the underlying arrogance in this way of perceiving the world. Frye uses arrogance to make clear how patriarchal power can be internalized and sustained in men and why this is a moral problem.

While Frye’s own work is using arrogance for the specific task of illustrating how patriarchal power affects our moral psychology, she is picking up on something central to arrogance as a moral vice beyond the way patriarchal influence manifests it.⁹ Arrogance is not just about looking down on others but about how the arrogant attend to others in a self-preoccupied way. The person who is actively self-preoccupied is engaging in certain patterns of attention that are symptomatic of overvaluing one’s self.¹⁰ Just like how looking down on others is an illustration of overvaluing one’s self, so is being self-preoccupied in one’s attention to others. This self-preoccupied way of attending to others roots or unifies the previously explored ways that the arrogant disrespect others. The forms of disrespect inherent in looking down on others is also inherent in self-preoccupied attention to others.

Notice how this self-preoccupation results in the kinds of disrespect discussed earlier. The globally arrogant are not simply failing to attend to others as individuals separate from themselves, they are denying that they are owed that attention. With greater moral importance, comes less moral attention and care for others. The arrogant, in finding themselves to be morally moral important, do not recognize the equal value of

⁹ It is worth noting that Frye does extend her insights about the arrogant eye to how women in community with each other can look on one another with the arrogant eye, but I take it that this is still—at least in part—a result of patriarchal power, which aims to keep women divided.

¹⁰ Bommarito (2013) similarly argues that modesty is a *virtue* of attention that involves either not attending to closely to one’s accomplishments, traits, or qualities, or attending to the contributions of others in one’s success. In this way, being modest is the opposite of self-preoccupation, it is a virtue marked by virtuous patterns of attention. This supports my reading that arrogance, a related vice, is a vicious way of attending to others in reference to the self. We might similarly think that humility is a virtue of attention that is interpersonal in the same way as arrogance, but holds many of the virtuous qualities Bommarito notes in modesty and pride (when not proper) could be a vice of attention directly opposite to modesty.

others, which constitutes their recognition disrespect. Those who are locally arrogant, looking down on others preemptively, also reveal self-preoccupied patterns of attention. Such arrogant people judge others along some personal standard, projecting the values inherent to that standard onto others. Where the globally arrogant deny moral attention, the locally arrogant will *grant* attention once someone has *earned* it. Both forms of arrogant disrespect are symptomatic of a person who is engaging in self-preoccupied patterns of attention.

In addition to showing how these forms of disrespect are related, the self-preoccupied nature of arrogance also gives us a deeper understanding of what is morally vicious about arrogance. In projecting one's values, cares, and concerns, one's way of *attending* to others is morally vicious. This is clear in Frye's explanation of the arrogant eye and how he who perceives with the arrogant eye is a "teleologist." The arrogant attend to others not as individuals with their own values and cares, but as edible objects that can be organized around his own desires. This way of relating to others is morally vicious both in failing to extend various forms of respect but also as a way of organizing one's perception of the world. It is a way to ignore the value and individuality of others. Although there are distinct ways that the arrogant person's disrespect can be morally vicious, they are also rooted in a vicious way of attending to others. In this way, arrogance is deeply vicious—the viciousness is at times overdetermined.

The deeply vicious nature of arrogance explains why it is often such a damning and significant moral criticism of a person. To call someone arrogant is to level a significant charge against that person. That there is something deeply wrong about how they relate to others and that it requires significant change to become morally okay. Because it is such a significant moral criticism, the tendency to charge marginalized people with arrogance is all the more significant. Charging someone with arrogance is to not only say that person is doing something wrong, but that there is something deeply vicious about how they relate to others. The significance of this moral criticism makes determining what is going wrong in the affective marginalization case socially and philosophically important.

2. (Mis)attributing Arrogance

With this understanding of arrogance as self-preoccupation, let us now return to the case of Kaepernick to examine misattributions of arrogance. Remember that Kaepernick said that he was "not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color" (Sandritter). He saw that he had a

platform as a professional athlete to bring attention to racial injustice and create a conversation about how people of color are treated in America. The act, then, was an act of protest—an assertion of his and other people of color’s worth as equals. He is reflecting an other-regarding attitude based in community with others who are harmed by racial injustice, not a self-preoccupied attitude based in his own value or importance.

Most actions can communicate different attitudes based on the way the actions are executed, the surrounding context, and the reasons for the behavior. The same is true of sitting during the national anthem. It is not hard to imagine a truly arrogant football player who sits during the national anthem because they simply don’t feel like it or because they find themselves to be “above the law.”¹¹ But Kaepernick’s decision to kneel during the anthem was to show recognition that the act he was engaging in was one of respectful protest, not out of dismissive, self-preoccupied reasons. The action is in the context of him being a professional athlete with a platform to bring awareness, and the reasons for him doing it were rooted in protest, which is not self-regarding in a preoccupied but respectful way. As Bernard Boxill has argued, acts of protest are often declarations of self-respect (1976, p 69). While not all cases of marginalized people being called arrogant involve explicit protest, most of the cases do involve the marginalized person revealing their own self-respect in some fashion. In these cases, such people, like Kaepernick, are not projecting their values, cares, and concerns onto others, they are asserting their rights to exist free from harm and declaring their own self-respect.

Misattributions of arrogance involve mistaking a healthy self-respect with self-preoccupation. The question then becomes, “why have so many viewed these expressions of self-respect as reflecting an arrogant attitude?” The difference between a healthy self-respect and a vicious self-preoccupation should be clear. One attitude recognizes one’s value while still being aware of and attending to others, while the other inflates one’s value in effect failing to attend to others properly. Given the blatant differences in these attitudes, something must be obscuring the marginalized person’s attitude. To figure out why misattributions of arrogance are common, we need to figure out how self-respect in the affectively marginalized is perceived as self-preoccupation. I argue that the affectively

¹¹ Robin Dillon appears to echo this notion of the arrogant thinking themselves as “above the law” with her Harry Potter example in “Arrogance, Self-Respect, and Personhood” (page 107). Similarly, in talking about *intellectual* arrogance, Alessandra Tanesini states that the arrogant take themselves to be “exempt from the ordinary responsibilities of participants in conversations, and especially in the practice of asserting” (“Calm Down, Dear,” 74) That is, their sense of superiority places themselves above conversational norms.

marginalized are *constructed* as lower or unimportant in our society, with our expectations for them to be servile (or, to lack self-respect).¹² This construction makes the possibility of the self-respecting marginalized person hard to imagine. In effect, people misperceive the affectively marginalized and fail to recognize someone's actions, the context of their actions, and the possible reasons motivating that action.

Before moving on to how the affectively marginalized are constructed, let's get clearer on what affective marginalization is. Shiloh Whitney (2018) argues that affective marginalization is "an expulsion from participation in affect circulation that depletes affective agency, influence, or authority" (p. 497). The affectively marginalized are therefore limited in how their affect gets read in a community. As P. F. Strawson (1963) has argued, moral attitudes are an important part of our social lives and moral communication with one another, so being marginalized along these lines is a significant loss because it interrupts important social and communicative processes. Importantly for Whitney, being expelled from affective participation leads to the sense and force of one's emotions and attitudes from being received. If someone is communicating self-respect via protest, then the force of that affective claim will not be felt, and the meaning communicated will not be understood. Due to this marginalization, the affectively marginalized often have their affects misperceived, resulting in harmful constructions of who they are and what affects are to be expected from them.

How the affectively marginalized are constructed is explored throughout the literature on race in philosophy and elsewhere. María Lugones gives us a useful example of how, depending on context, she is perceived as either serious or playful (2003, p. 86-87, 92). Lugones reports that many of her friends, specifically other women of color, view her as playful. A description with which she also identifies. However, white women often take her to be very *serious* and not at all playful. Lugones does not behave differently with these two groups of people, code-switching when necessary, but argues that the dominant "world" is unwilling to construct her as playful. In a dominantly white/Anglo world, a Latina like her cannot be playful but is always serious. The way she is understood changes. For Lugones, she understands this difference in construction by people living in different "worlds". While white/Anglo people in the U.S. live in the dominant world, the marginalized exist in other "worlds" of sense, forcing them to travel between these "worlds" to survive (2003, p.90-97). W.E.B. Du Bois talks about this phenomenon similarly

¹² For the sense of servile I'm using, see Thomas Hill's *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (1991) and Bernard Boxill's and Jan Boxill's "Servility and Self-Respect: An African-American and Feminist Critique" (2015).

saying there are two worlds separated by a great veil, the white world and the black world, and blacks (and other people of color) see through the veil and live with a double consciousness, recognizing how the white world looks on them with “amused contempt and pity” (1903/2018, p. 7). More recently, José Medina argues that there is a *social imaginary* serving as a resource for how we understand each other, but that this resource is shaped by oppression, limiting the ways most people can understand or *imagine* people who are marginalized (2013, p. 64-70). The social imaginary does not contain the notion that marginalized people can be confident and self-respecting, and therefore this behavior is unintelligible to privileged perceivers. There is no lack of theoretical resources to make sense of how marginalized people are constructed as serious or servile. No matter how we understand this form of construction, what’s important is that it limits people (largely those who are privileged) from understanding marginalized people’s attitudes and behaviors. To such perceives, the possibility of the affectively marginalized having self-respect is incomprehensible. In many cases of one having self-respect, people will misperceive it as arrogance.

That one’s self-respect is misunderstood as arrogance is likely due to the relationship between the attitude and one’s self. People with self-respect have a healthy recognition of their own value and place in the world. They recognize that they are equals with others and show proper concern for their needs and wants (Hill, 1991, p. 9-10). In recognizing their needs and wants, the self-respecting person, understandably, recognizes their self. Their self figures into the way they see the world since they will not stand for being dismissed or for their needs to be ignored. The self-respecting person has a clear sense of their values and lives according to them (Hill, p. 21). But notice that the *way* they recognize their values is not self-preoccupied. The self-respecting person does not project their values, cares, and concerns onto others. However, when one refuses to let their needs be ignored or their cares to be dismissed, this can often appear self-preoccupied because it does not fit how such people are constructed in society. Recognizing and living by one’s values can come off as projecting one’s cares, concerns, and values. Part of being constructed as servile is the expectation that the oppressed will live their lives according to the values in dominant society, living by the values that the more privileged find important or relevant for someone of that station. Furthermore, it can make their cares, concerns, or needs, look like mere personal values. By recognizing one’s own needs and in living by one’s own values, the marginalized break with how they are constructed, and their subsequent behavior becomes unintelligible or perceived as

self-preoccupied. What is a healthy recognition of the self appears as a vicious preoccupation with the self.

But how can people be so easily confused? Especially with cases like Kaepernick's, the person is engaging in protest, they are explicitly stating their reasons for action which should reveal that even if one disagrees with the actions, they are clearly not being arrogant. One possibility is that someone may agree that engaging in protest (or whatever activity) is not arrogant but that *the way* someone is protesting is arrogant. It may be that those calling Kaepernick arrogant are thinking he sees himself as "above the law" by protesting in a provocative manner—despite provocation being the point. Indeed, some have made the argument that while Kaepernick has a right to protest, he should not do so in a way that disrespects the United States.¹³ However, there is reason to believe that no matter how Kaepernick protests, people would still find him arrogant for protesting. First, marginalized people are regularly called arrogant even when engaging in more traditional forms of protest.¹⁴ Second, even in situations when one is not protesting on behalf of one's self, one may be called arrogant.

For example, when feminist and environmentalist Wangari Muta Mathai protested the demolition of a city park in Kenya, government officials called her arrogant (Perlez 1989). The very act of standing up for one's values or beliefs leads to marginalized people being seen as arrogant, no matter how they do it, or on whose behalf they are protesting. In response to being called 'arrogant', Muta Mathai said, "[they] can't stand a woman who stands up. I'm being seen as an arrogant woman because I dare to object. I call them arrogant" (Perlez 1989). Again, the affectively marginalized are constructed to not have their own values, cares, and concerns and voicing those in public space can be misperceived as projecting those values in an arrogant fashion. The marginalized person's identity is doing much of the work in being mistaken as arrogant since it is how they're constructed that determines how they are read. However, in Muta Mathai's flipping the script, and calling the government officials arrogant, we have a further suggestion for what is going on.

In calling the government officials arrogant, Muta Mathai is drawing our attention to how the problem lies not in the marginalized person's behavior, but in the expectations

¹³ Conservative political commentator Tomi Lahren makes this argument while discussing Kaepernick's protest with Trevor Noah on *The Daily Show*—see, "Tomi Lahren and Trevor Noah discuss Colin Kaepernick's protest."

¹⁴ For example, immigrants are often called arrogant when seeking U.S. citizenship.

of the person calling them arrogant. Since the marginalized are expected to be servile, they are expected to take on the values of the dominant society instead of having their own. Dominant culture simply does not see self-regard among othered populations as one among plural values available for a person, but instead as either deviant or unfounded. Having one's own personal values becomes unintelligible which makes claims that are rooted in those values invisible. The same social processes that make the marginalized appear arrogant are the ones that make it difficult to recognize the relevance of their claims. When the claims inherent in one's actions are rendered unintelligible or unimportant, the conditions are created for their actions and attitudes to be misunderstood.

Misattributions of arrogance are not only the result of being misunderstood, but these misunderstandings also reinforce the construction. Charges of arrogance not only reflect oppression they reinforce it. When someone criticizes the affectively marginalized as arrogant, it effectively deflects attention away from what the oppressed person is saying or doing toward a negative evaluation of their character, thus denying them uptake.¹⁵ Denying uptake involves someone making a claim that they want a second party to recognize and the second party responding to the claimant with something irrelevant to their claim. The irrelevant response deflects attention from the initial claim onto something else, such as the claimant's character. The person denying uptake need not recognize that they are deflecting attention from the initial claim—they are effectively doing this even if it is out of ignorance. When the claimant is socially marginalized, denying uptake silences the claimant due to their membership in a social group and reinforces a pattern where claims from that group need not be taken on.¹⁶ In the case of calling someone 'arrogant' a pattern is being reinforced where we do not need to attend to the claim in the person's speech or actions, seeing these acts as reflections of their arrogance, effectively leaving the "arrogant" person silenced.¹⁷ Even if one is not

¹⁵ See Frye (1983) on how marginalized people's attitudes (anger, for Frye) can be denied uptake and lead to silencing.

¹⁶ For more on how forms of language like criticism can lead to silencing marginalized people, see McGowan (2009, 2019) on conversational exercitives.

¹⁷ Poet and essayist Hanif Abdurraqib discusses the way charges of arrogance (or being told to be humble) is often a way to silence people of color in his essay "Serena Williams and the Policing of Imagined Arrogance" in his book *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us*. Abdurraqib writes, "...if the past three years since the death of Trayvon Martin have taught me anything, it's that people have found so

intentionally deflecting attention from someone's claim to equality, one is *effectively* doing so, as well as sending a signal that it is permissible for others to do the same. This tendency, then, both reflects and reinforces oppression.

Misattributions of arrogance occur because marginalized people are constructed as servile, making their self-respect unintelligible. Instead, this self-respect is mistaken for other, more vicious self-regarding attitudes like that of arrogance. Furthermore, when marginalized people are then criticized as arrogant it reinforces this confused way of understanding them, further perpetuating an illusory image while also silencing them from dissent. In effect, they are often left unable to correct it. That the affectively marginalized are so constructed alters our normal moral practices and criticism since we need to pay extra attention to if we are getting such criticisms right. The need for this attention is even more significant because getting it wrong is not solely an issue of misplaced judgment but of further perpetuating the same harm on not only the person you have misperceived but all members of the same social group. However, none of this is to claim that marginalized people *can't* be arrogant. Attending to how the context of oppression alters arrogance in these cases should lead us to wonder whether arrogance is always a vice in the oppressed and ask, "Can arrogance in the oppressed be in some way good?"

3. Beautiful Arrogance

The answer to that question is yes, arrogance in the oppressed can be in some way good. Arrogance in the affectively marginalized can be attractive, radiating beauty that lifts the self-respect of marginalized groups, creating political value. I call this kind of arrogance *beautiful arrogance*. In typical instances, arrogance is morally vicious because of the preoccupation with the self and how that involves disrespecting others. However, I argue, in contexts of oppression this attitude may *not* be morally vicious, that this disrespectful nature of arrogance is diminished, making salient other features of the attitude. I do not take this to mean that such arrogance is a moral virtue. Instead, the attitude of arrogance in these contexts has a neutral moral evaluation. This neutral

many new ways to say "silence." ...it is definitely what is meant when Serena Williams is looked at, careless and immersed in joy, and is told, "Be more 'humble'." (235).

evaluation, paired with the political value, makes this arrogance beautiful. In this way, beautiful arrogance is, on the overall evaluation of the attitude, good.¹⁸

In the previous section, the way affectively marginalized people are constructed was central to understanding misattributions of arrogance. This construction not only alters the way more privileged people perceive those who are marginalized, it affects how the marginalized perceive themselves. This toxic self-perception is the central insight from Du Bois' writing on *double-consciousness*, stating that black Americans are "looking at *one's self* through the eyes of others" (1903/2018, p. 7, emphasis mine). Part of what it is to be constructed as servile, lower, or lacking self-respect is to see oneself that way. Being constructed as servile leads one's actions to be misread as such, but this construction also leads to the internalization of such attitudes, what Sandra Bartky calls an "internalization of intimations of inferiority" (1990, p. 22).

Internalizations of inferiority can manifest through what Robin Dillon calls a damaged or weakened *basal self-respect* (1997). Dillon states that there is a "prereflective, unarticulated, emotionally laden form of self-respect," which serves as an "invisible lens through which everything connected with the self is viewed and presumed to be disclosed" (1997, p. 241). This prior, emotionally laden self-respect is necessary for one to have the more robust sense of self-respect discussed earlier. Those who are oppressed, according to Dillon, often have *damaged* basal self-respect, marking a lack of self-esteem and inhibiting their ability to live good lives. The result is that while one may intellectually recognize one's worth and values, one cannot *feel* one's worth. This disconnection between intellectual and emotional recognition impedes one from having the kind of self-respect necessary for avoiding servility (see, Hill, 1991). The road to self-respect for the affectively marginalized is a difficult one. It involves not just the normal difficulties we all face trying to live in line with our values, but *psychic* barriers to its achievement.¹⁹ These psychic barriers keep them from developing the kind of felt sense of worth and value that makes self-respect possible.

However, damaged basal self-respect is not only an issue for developing self-respect, but any self-regarding attitude. According to Dillon, *everything* connected with

¹⁸ This approach to evaluating the attitude is based in the work of Bernard Williams where moral reasons are not overriding, but just one component of an overall or "all things considered" evaluation of some attitude or action. See, "Ethical Consistency" and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

¹⁹ These kinds of internalized barriers are what Sandra Bartky called "psychological oppression" and involve how our own psychology can work against us when trying to live our lives.

the self is seen through or recognized via one's basal self-respect. Lacking basal self-respect involves a diminished self. One will not only face difficulty in developing self-respect but also in developing other self-regarding attitudes such as arrogance. Arrogance centrally involves a self-preoccupation that projects itself onto the world around the agent. The arrogant person's self is not diminished but inflated. It is a self that not only recognizes its value but feels superior, enlightened, or special.

Cultivating arrogance in the face of affective marginalization is a significant accomplishment. Where so many are pressured into servility, and so few can achieve a feeling of self-worth, the arrogant are rich in it. This same attitudinal attribute, centering the self and projecting one's values, begins to take on a different character. What is typically most noticeable about arrogance is the way it involves disrespecting others, but in cases under oppression the accomplishment of valuing one's self becomes apparent. Although the same forms of disrespect and self-respect are present in all arrogance, the different ways it develops in people's lives will make different aspects salient. In the affectively marginalized, what can become salient is not the disrespect but the presence of basal self-respect.

What allows for the increased basal self-respect to become salient is how this arrogance can be localized around one's marginalized identity. Remember that arrogance can come in both global and local varieties. Someone has global arrogance when they believe themselves to be a *better person* than everyone else, whereas someone has local arrogance when their arrogance is only present in specific contexts. Since global arrogance always involves disrespecting others, this kind of arrogance is still deeply vicious when present in the affectively marginalized. But when localized around a marginalized identity, the primary character of the arrogance is not the disrespect but the richness of the basal self-respect. The arrogance is rooted in the very thing that marks out the affectively marginalized as oppressed. For example, a Latino with this kind of arrogance is centering his self because of his being Latino. The projection of one's cares and concerns are those cares and concerns of being Latino in an oppressive context. For example, wanting better access to resources, wanting fairer judgments, wanting freedom to move about the world without his citizenship being questioned, and so on. What one immediately notices, then, is not the ways in which he may disrespect (and he does) it is how deeply and richly he feels his self to be of value and significance despite society constantly telling him otherwise.

One may argue that this attitude is not actually arrogance, or perhaps, not importantly arrogance, but pride. The Latino takes joy, fulfillment, and a sense of meaning in being Latino and *that* is what we latch onto when admiring his attitude. Whatever arrogance the Latino may possess is an unnecessary addition (and one we'd rather he lacked) and what we actually admire is his pride. Pride in one's identity that has been systematically derided is certainly a beautiful thing. But I think there is a distinct way arrogance can also be a beautiful thing. The arrogant Latino is not merely taking joy, fulfillment, and a sense of meaning in being Latino, he is centering his *self*. The prideful Latino need not center his self at all. He simply appreciates his heritage and culture, despite forms of cultural imperialism deriding it.²⁰ The arrogant Latino is centering his self, despite the psychic barriers that prevent him from valuing his self. In this way, the arrogant Latino is doing something much more significant. The prideful Latino could be proud of his Latino roots, while still struggling to have a strong sense of self. The arrogant Latino does not have this struggle.

The relationship between centering his self and his marginalized identity explains the neutral moral evaluation. Being self-preoccupied, typically, is a moral failure because centering one's self gets in the way of attending others—it involves projecting one's cares and concerns out on the world. But centering one's self because of one's marginalized identity decenters the disrespectful nature of arrogance. What becomes salient is what the arrogance stands for in the marginalized person, which is not solely about one's self, but one's self in relation to systems of oppression. Having arrogance localized around one's marginalized identity involves recognizing that we are not isolated selves but selves in systems of relation to others.²¹ This arrogance is morally neutral because while there are still forms of disrespect present, the focus on the self is not of the same character as standard instances of arrogance.

In calling such arrogance morally neutral, I am claiming that one would have a hard time blaming or criticizing the presence of this attitude in the affectively marginalized person. While one could certainly be morally better, the context in which the attitude arises makes it not worth criticizing. Something being morally neutral in this way is hardly worth mentioning unless there is also a positive evaluation of another kind (i.e., political,

²⁰ For more on cultural imperialism see Young (1990).

²¹ For more on relationality see the edited volume by Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000).

prudential, etc). The kind of arrogance I think can be properly called *beautiful arrogance* is not merely morally neutral, but also carries with it positive political value.

As I stated before, beautiful arrogance can be attractive and awe-inspiring. Beyond mere aesthetics, such arrogance provides an example of how to center one's self despite the intimations of inferiority the affectively marginalized internalize. Consider this statement made by Civil Rights organizer Lawrence Guyot about boxer Muhammad Ali,

We were down there in these small, hot, dusty towns, in an atmosphere thick with fear, trying to organize folk whose grandparents were slaves. A town where you had the Klan on one side, the local sheriff's department on the other, and more than a little intermingling between the two. And here was this *beautifully arrogant* young man who made us proud to be us and proud to fight for our rights. (Ezra, 2009, 121-122, emphasis mine)

The attractiveness roots the political value of beautiful arrogance. Such arrogance provides an example of strong basal self-respect which others in the community can draw from. It can serve as an example and motivator for a group's collective power. It does this because the beautifully arrogant are not merely proud about being, in Ali's case, black, but centering one's self. In centering one's self, others can see how they too can have that same felt sense of worth and take pride in who they are.²²

The political value of beautiful arrogance is due to how it serves as a form of resistance to affective marginalization.²³ The attractiveness of beautiful arrogance builds up others in the community and therefore helps aid in the *community's* resistance. This is important because this makes such resistance not merely of ethical value but of *political* value. It is valuable for the way it uplifts others in a community who can feel stronger motivation to work toward political ends. This is the insight we gain from Guyot, that a community is strengthened and supported when they see a member of their own be beautifully arrogant.

One may worry that there is something wrong, or at least unfortunate, with arrogance, typically a moral vice, having political value. That our fight toward living without the barrier of oppression should be done in a way that realizes the kind of world we want to have. One may think like Martin Luther King, Jr. that our means should be just

²² Notably, it's interesting how arrogance produces pride in others of the same group. There seems to be something about the arrogance itself that allows others to feel proud that mere pride does not. This relationship requires much more space than I have here to fully explore.

²³ In a narrow way, beautiful arrogance is an example of individual, or what has been called "quiet" resistance. See, Tamara Fakhoury (2021).

as righteous as our ends.²⁴ There are two things to say about this worry. The first is to dismiss this concern as unnecessary moralizing. Part of the value of taking an all things considered point of view on evaluating the attitude is to recognize that there is more to life than moral pursuits. More to the point, there are endless ways of developing moral character, and it is not the case that we need to fully develop each virtue to be good people, or to live a fulfilling life. As Susan Wolf (1982) has noted, the world presents us with all too many opportunities to engage in moral causes and cultivate moral attributes. That someone lacks any one goal or attribute does not make them immoral.

The second response though is less dismissive. We may admit that there is indeed something unfortunate about arrogance serving as a form of political resistance. But what is unfortunate about it does not have to do with the beautifully arrogant person, but with the context in which they live. That they exist in a society that is so hellbent on diminishing their self and limiting their movement in the world that they must resort to cultivating arrogance to uplift themselves and others. The nonideal world in which we live creates opportunities for political resistance that may not line up with the values we hope to establish in the future.

Claiming that beautiful arrogance is all things considered good does not imply that it is without drawbacks. We can simultaneously think there is something good about such arrogance and hold that cultivating it comes at a cost. As Tiberius and Walker (1998) argue, arrogance creates barriers to valuable relationships (p. 386-389).²⁵ An arrogant attitude creates psychological distance between the arrogant person and others, making it hard to build relationships. However, this cost is heavily mediated by the localized nature of beautiful arrogance. Since beautiful arrogance is rooted in one's marginalized identity, bonds in one's own social group will likely remain strong. The bonds that will suffer are those among people who are not in one's own social group, and especially those who hold privilege over them along that axis. Furthermore, the psychological distancing that comes with looking down on oppressors can protect one's self-esteem from harmful and erroneous criticism.²⁶ It is in this preemptive distancing that arrogance

²⁴ See, "A Letter from Birmingham Jail".

²⁵ See also, Macalester Bell, 2013, p. 112-113.

²⁶ Alessandra Tanesini's discussion of intellectual arrogance in "'Calm Down, Dear'" reflects this point. There she argues that arrogance is a way "to protect one's self-esteem against other people's real or imaginary challenges" (90). In typical cases, she argues, this is by way of delusion, but in contexts of

can also serve as a way of resisting one's oppression. It is a way of refusing to give voice to those who will only reinforce your oppression. Those who prove that they can support their marginalized friends and family will be granted access in the same way the arrogant nerd grants access to those who prove themselves qualified.

With that said, the benefit of this distancing comes with a trade-off. Beautiful arrogance may present problems for building bonds across different groups. Since we are concerned here with not only personal resistance but political resistance, we should be aware of how beautiful arrogance can get in the way of coalition building. Arguably, the most effective and beneficial forms of resistance emphasize working across different groups toward universal goals. For example, consider how Fred Hampton's work with the Black Panthers did not focus solely on the struggle for racial equality, but sought out to work with poor whites, Latinos, and many other groups who suffered many of the same harms as blacks. Similarly, we may look to Martin Luther King Jr.'s focus on supporting worker's unions and Vietnam protestors as part of his work toward black civil rights. Even the often-maligned Malcolm X, who at one point himself may be a good example of beautiful arrogance, reconceptualized his pursuit of racial equality from being a black vs. white issue to a multi-racial pursuit toward freedom. The beautifully arrogant person is not situated well, given how arrogance creates distance, to be a leading part of such coalition building. With that said, it does take all kinds. A healthy pluralism to how we approach, and fight instances of injustice is likely the way to move forward. At the same time, it is important to recognize the limits of these various approaches. In our attempt to appreciate what is often maligned, we should not be too quick to valorize without recognizing the full consequences of what we find attractive in others.

4. Concluding thoughts

A year after Colin Kaepernick started his national anthem protest, NFL executives agreed to not sign him to another contract, effectively ending his professional football career (Robinson, 2020). Since then, he has continued to use his platform by starting an organization called *Know Your Rights Camp*, which holds free seminars for disadvantaged youth to learn U.S. history and their legal rights and has worked with other activists and writers to promote social justice literacy. On April 2nd, 2022, Kaepernick threw passes to

oppression it seems like arrogance can protect one's self-esteem without the delusional aspect for the previously stated reasons.

undrafted NFL prospects as part of a half-time show, telling NFL teams, via reporters, "I can help make you a better team, I can help you win games" (Boren 2022). Kaepernick's persistence in the face of losing his NFL career is a testament to his self-respect, both basal and otherwise. While I do not believe Kaepernick is arrogant, beautiful or otherwise, I don't think I could blame him if he centered his self, given all that he's been through.

While far from being the worst off among us, Kaepernick's affective marginalization shows a clear sign of how many of us are systematically misunderstood, misperceived, and criticized. It is in attending to the marginalization, the conditions of oppression, that bring us clarity. Our understanding of arrogance, like many other negative attitudes, is complicated by the existence of oppression. Looking at how arrogance interacts with oppression can reveal how the affectively marginalized's attitudes are often misunderstood, where the negative attitude that is believed to be present is actually absent. Furthermore, it can reveal to us that cultivating such attitudes can be beneficial for the oppressed person, boosting their community, preserving their *self*.

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